

Board of Park Commissioners Briefing

Urban Forest Management Plan

September 28, 2006

Requested Board Action

This is a briefing for the Board on the City's Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP). No specific action is required by the Board.

Project Description and Background

The City's Urban Forest Coalition (UFC) has completed work on the draft UFMP and the document is now out for public review and comment. The UFMP identifies the benefits and values associated with a healthy urban forest. The document is framed around an Urban Forest Sustainability Model. The 'state' of Seattle's urban forest is assessed within the context of three primary sustainability elements; Tree/Vegetation Resource, Management of the Resource and Community Framework. From this assessment and associated analysis, general goals and recommendations have been developed. The UFMP also looks at the urban forest at the land-use planning level with the City's land-use planning categories becoming 'Management Units'. A related but separate set of goals and recommendations have also been developed for each of the designated Management Units. Using nationally accepted modeling, the costs/benefits of the urban forest have also been estimated. Costs include planting and long-term care. Benefits include the dollar values of stormwater retention, air cleaning and other less tangible benefits. Most importantly, the UFMP identifies the current amount of tree canopy coverage across the city and includes recommendations for canopy enhancement by Management Unit.

The UFMP is intended to serve as a roadmap to guide the management of tree resources in Seattle for decades to come. Implementation of the UFMP will be based upon the availability of resources, both dollars and people. For that reason, while it is referred to as a 30-year plan, full implementation within that timeframe is not guaranteed.

Public Involvement Process

The public involvement process for the UFMP began in 2000 with the development of an urban forest strategic plan. The Cascadia Consulting Group and the U of W were contracted to provide the UFC with a general assessment of Seattle's urban forest as a starting point for determining long-term planning needs. This process involved two community stakeholder workshops and phone survey contact with over 600 registered voters. Development of the UFMP is a follow-up step to completion of the Strategic Plan in 2001. The development of the UFMP has included a technical stakeholder workshop and two very recently completed public workshops. The technical stakeholder workshop was attended by 14 urban forestry professionals from throughout the region, while the recent public workshops were attended by 23 and 30 participants respectively.

Issues

The primary issues raised by staff are as follows:

- Attain 5 – 7 years tree maintenance cycles (consistent with industry standards)
- Achieve the desired canopy cover goals for developed parks and forested parklands
- Obtain financial support for key UFMP programs:
 - The Green Seattle Partnership
 - 2:1 tree replacement executive order
 - Expanded volunteer programs
 - Adequate tree establishment/follow-up (new plantings)

The primary concerns raised at the two public meetings were:

- The City's inability through, incentives or regulations, to adequately preserve both public and private trees, particularly large trees
- The City's lack of adequate tree maintenance resources
- The perception that so many City Departments involved in tree management makes it difficult for the public to know who to contact first
- A general lack of resources devoted to tree management

Budget

Implementing all the recommendations in the UFMP would cost in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Funding over time will likely come from a variety of resources from inside and outside of city government.

Schedule

As mentioned earlier, the UFMP has no specific schedule or timeline. However, the actions/recommendation are prioritized by short, medium and long-term, with short term equaling 0 – 5 years, medium equaling 5 – 10 years and long being post 10 years.

Additional Information

The entire draft UFMP is available for viewing on the PAN and copies can be found at all libraries and community centers.